DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 337 001 FL 019 578

AUTHOR Gahala, Estella M.
TITLE Increasing Student Participation in the Foreign Language Class.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 13p.; In: "Perspectives on Proficiency: Curriculum & Instruction. Dimension: Language '84-'85." (see FL 019 565). p131-142.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; *Classroom Communication; *Classroom Environment; Classroom Techniques; Elementary Secondary Education; Games; Grouping (Instructional Purposes); Higher Education; Interaction; Language of Instruction; *Language Proficiency; *Language Role; *Second Language Instruction; *Student Participation; Teacher Behavior; Teacher Expectations of Students

ABSTRACT

Producing a high level of student involvement in the foreign language classroom depends on four common elements under the teacher's control: (1) teacher expectations and their modeling in class; (2) classroom atmosphere; (3) instructional formats; and (4) teaching activities. Students are more consistently involved in using the target language in classes where the teacher expects the target language to be the dominant if not sole means of communication from the first day of class. It is the teacher's responsibility to model behaviors expected of students. Classroom participation is a public performance in which each student risks embarrassment and failure. Developing a low-stress environment while keeping students on task and aware is difficult, but can be aided by positive reinforcement. Research indicates that the smaller the group of students working together, the more teacher-student interaction is exhibited. Thus, while there is a place for large-group instruction, paired student activities, which reduce the number of human variables the speaker copes with, offer optimal language use. Class activities that require little preparation and can be used spontaneously are often preferred, and some activities have been found to promote active student involvement consistently. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Max. Gaetman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED337001

13

Increasing Student Participation in the Foreign Language Class

Estella M. Gahala
Foreign Language Consultant
Park Ridge, Illinois

What foreign language program does not have for its primary and ultimate objective teaching students to use the target language for communication? We plan for classes filled with the sounds of the target language coming from every student and a forest of eager hands in the air signialing answers to our questions. However, we may content ourselves with less than the envisioned articulate, eager performances. The classroom may be analogous to the football field. Every football play sketched on the blackboard goes for a touchdown; the same play run on the field may not. What then are the differences between those classrooms that promote communicative "touchdowns" and those that do not?

The solution to producing a high level of student involvement seems to lie in four common classroom elements that are under the teacher's control: 1) teacher expectations and modeling those expectations; 2) classroom atmosphere; 3) instructional formats; and 4) teaching activities. In this paper, the teacher behaviors in each of these four categories, which tend to increase the quantity and quality of student participation, will be examined more closely.

Teacher Expectations and Modeling Those Expectations

Students are more consistently involved in using the target language in classes where the teacher expects the target language to be the dominant, if not the sole, means of communication from the first day of the first class throughout the entire sequence of instruction. It is the teacher's responsibility to model behaviors expected of students. Knop, (1984) identifies these as "no excuse" areas for English usage in the foreign language class:

FL019578

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

1. Greetings, leavetaking, and social exchange between teacher and students. Social amenities in the target language establish the expectation that the language will be used. Furthermore, students increase their ability to recognize acceptable social expressions before they are formally presented in the curriculum. While formulaic and routine, these exchanges should be personalized to fit the persons and situations of each class period.
2. Giving directions for instruction, management, and housekeeping. Think of phrases endlessly repeated: *Open your books . . . Go to the blackboard . . . We are on page 43, Exercise C . . . More loudly please . . . Quiet . . .* etc. Their repetitiousness plus the ease with which they can be shown as well as told places them high on the list of things alwasy to be said in the target language.
3. Brief explanations, particularly as they help students track their progress through the day's lesson. Most of us use set phrases to signal transitions in the lesson: *what we are doing now . . . That's all for now . . . Now we're going to . . . The test on lesson 4 will cover . . .* etc. Brief lesson plans can also be written on the board in the target language.
4. Probing, getting students to say one thing more. During daily recitation, students can be encouraged to expand upon their planned response by the teacher's asking one more probing question. Whatever the last sentence spoken by the student, a question asking *how often, how much, when, where, do you,* or *who else* may elicit spontaneous use of the language. It is also a check on the student's real understanding of what he/she just said.
5. Rewards, feedback, and emotional reactions. As teachers we need an extensive repertory of ways of letting students know when a response is good, acceptable, or needs some alteration. Variety, authenticity, and sensitivity are important in giving students feedback on their performance. It is equally useful to teach them ways of reacting both positively and negatively (qué bueno, quelle horreur) to announcements such as a quiz or a bit of school news.

Using the target language requires the teacher to keep the language within the comprehension level of the students and to exert great self-discipline in avoiding relapses into English. The results are well worth the effort.

Classroom Atmosphere

Classroom participation is a public performance in which each student risks embarrassment and failure. Developing a low-stress environment while keeping students on task and aware of what is important is, needless to say, a challenge. Positive reinforcement for desired behaviors should exceed instances of negative reinforcement for undesirable behaviors. There is evidence to suggest that positive reinforcement is the exception, not the rule. (Chance, 1985) On the first day of class, it may be more important to establish a climate in which each person feels a sense of belonging than to list the rules of conduct or the year's course objectives. Keeping all students involved is best done by calling on them all, avoiding "blind spots," moving throughout the classroom, and by giving moderate attention to each individual without overdoing it. Phrasing questions, adjusting pace or level of difficulty to assure adequate challenge can boost student self-confidence. Our questions should encourage students to take some risks while remaining optimistic about the probability of performing well. Adequate feedback on progress, interesting presentations, and novelty increase student interest and motivation. (Hunter, 1982) "I never ask the students to do something that I am not willing to do myself," says one award-winning teacher. (Rodriguez, 1985) Teachers who participate in classroom games, who encourage students to ask them questions or give them commands, and then who answer their questions and perform their commands, often humorously, establish a more orderly and dynamic classroom than any set of rules and regulations could create.

Madeline Hunter (1982) defines motivation as the "intent to learn." While we always hope for students possessing intrinsic motivation ("Teach me; I'm yours."), she reminds us that extrinsic motivation can be acquired. Although the tone of the classroom is important, building on the student's sense of success and progress is equally important. Charting progress toward goals can be more effective than keeping track of grades. This helps them measure progress in terms of themselves rather than by comparison with others' performances. For example: "Do you know that in this lesson you learned twenty-five new words of things to buy and where to buy them?" "When we finish lesson 9, you will be able to take your family to a Mexican restaurant and order a meal in Spanish."

Instructional Formats

Should we be astonished to learn that the majority of us favor instructional formats that limit rather than increase the amount of student use of the target language? A study conducted at the University of Wisconsin, (Nerenz & Knop, 1982) found that to be so, and my own

informal observations corroborate those findings. In a study involving eight foreign language teachers, each one randomly observed eleven times over an eight-week period, these findings emerged. The amount of time spent in four different group sizes was as follows:

Large group (9 or more students)	74.8%
Individual	8.25%
Pairs	5.3%
Small group (3-8 students)	2.9%

Clearly, large group instruction was preferred by a vast majority of cooperating teachers.

By means of a set of observational procedures, the amount of teachers-student interaction was charted for each of the group sizes. The proportion of student talk to teacher talk was as follows:

Individual	.61/1
Large group	.85/1
Small group	3.78/1
Pairs	8.44/1

The favored large group instruction produced about a 50-50 oral exchange between students and teacher; that is, the students spoke nearly as much as the teachers. In individualized instruction, students spoke about 2/3 as often as teachers. In small group instruction, students spoke almost four times as much. However, during paired instruction, students spoke more than eight times as much as teachers.

The realities of teaching tell us that each group size has its proper place in a repertory of teaching techniques. Large group instruction is most effective in introducing a block of information or explaining a concept that is new to all the students. Such explanations must be followed by group practice to assist individuals in understanding the applications of the idea and to help the teacher identify potential areas of misunderstanding. Small groups and pairs offer increased opportunity for further drill, practice, and applications once the initial concept is understood. Because pairs reduces the number of human variables more than small groups, many teachers use pairs for drill and practice and small groups for more creative applications. And individual instruction is a useful remediation to help individuals keep up with the group or progress beyond the group-imposed limits.

If paired instruction can so dramatically increase student classroom use of language, why do so few of us use it regularly? It may be that discipline and student management represent a major concern. Uncertainty about which learning activities effectively complement paired instruction is another. Development of effective paired activities includes four steps: First, the teacher takes time to establish and practice the process by which each student works with a partner. For example, the teacher may explain that

today's partner will be the person in front, behind, to the right, or to the left, depending on where you start. By changing seating arrangements two to four times per year, the number of potential partners multiplies. Time spent explaining the process and finding one's partner is time saved in all subsequent activities. Second, the teacher gives very specific task instructions so that there can be no doubt as to who is doing what. If, for example, the purpose of this paired exercise is to practice and master material from today's homework, the teacher may say: (Student A), you read the questions or cues from Exercise A and B. (Student B), you read the answers from your homework. If in doubt about the right answer, try to agree. If you can't agree, go on to the next one. As soon as you have finished, reverse roles. When Student B has asked the questions and Student A has answered, close your books and turn your homework face down." The third step is an extension of the second one of giving precise instructions about the task. Set specific time limits: "You have two minutes." A short time creates a sense of urgency. Too much time is encouragement to dawdle. If time is too short, extend the time period unobtrusively. The fourth and final step is to explain the payoff. What will be the consequences of this quick practice? In this instance, it might be a brief session in which the teacher asks the same questions that the students practiced with variations. The objective might be to get as many answers as possible within a short time. A simple scoring procedure facilitates translating the oral performance into an oral recitation grade. In summary, the four steps of practicing the "paired" process, giving precise task instructions, imposing time limits for task completion, and providing a payoff for doing it elimate most problems arising from student management.

Many teachers feel that the more mechanical the exercise, the more easily it lends itself to paired practice, thus saving the teacher's energy for more creative, open-ended language applications. When pairs and small groups are given the opportunity to work on something more creative, the teacher will have to make adjustments in time, task assignments, and feedback for the payoff. A first effort at a paired activity should be planned throughly so that success is guaranteed.

Teaching Activities

After the teacher has set the expectation of maximum language use in the classroom, has demonstrated by his/her own actions that expectation, has established a classroom atmosphere that encourages students to participate or "perform," has selected instructional groups that facilitate increased language use, what kinds of activities work best? The possibilities are endless, limited only by each individual's imagination and energy. Activities that require little or no prior preparation and that can be

implemented spontaneously when the time feels right are often preferred. There are kinds of exercises that appear to consistently promote active student involvement in class, encourage progress toward communicative skills, and promote proficiency in language. Exercises that increase student participation and retention of learned content:

1. are placed in a context integrating the need for both linguistic and communicative competence.
2. refer to the learners themselves or others known to them. They are not anonymous and depersonalized.
3. emphasize language function and meaning, not form.
4. involve interactive use of authentic language. There is situational realism.
5. contain emotional material such as humor or pathos.
6. allow some student choice, opportunities for creativity, or drawing inferences through problem-solving and even guessing. They are not mechanical or predictable.
7. are clearly structured in expectations of what the students do, but provide open-ended possibilities. (Celce-Murcia, 1985; Omaggio, 1985; Robinson, 1985)

Here are some sample exercises that have many of the above characteristics and that are adaptable for use in small groups or pairs.

Navigator/Pilot
Skill: listening comprehension, speaking
Linguistic content: *to go*, geographical names, ordinal numbers, words and phrases expressing time or sequence.
The pilot is given a drawing representing a map of countries, town, streets of a neighborhood, or layout of the school. The navigator orally gives instructions on which places will be visited and in what order. The pilot either traces the route or numbers the sequence of places visited. When finished, the pilot checks with the navigator on the correctness of his/her paper. The students can then reverse roles.
Feedback: Question-answer session asking, "Where do you go? Tell me where she goes? Where is the third place you go? Is it near. . .?"

Decorator/Architect
Skill: listening comprehension, speaking or writing
Linguistic content: *to be, to put*, nouns of topic chosen, prepositions of location, cardinal points
This is a variation on *Pilot/Navigator*. Student A tells student B where to

place objects in a square or other defined space. These objects may represent furniture in a room, rooms in a house, stores around a square, departments in a store.

Order, please
Skill: listening comprehension, speaking
Linguistic content: common vocabulary from the current and/or previous lessons, syntax, adverbs of quantity or frequency (*mucho, un poco, beaucoup, un peu, pas du tout, muchas veces, a veces jamás, souvent, quelquefois, rarement*)
Teacher or student reads aloud items or activities in groups of three. Students individually rank them according to instructions (preference, frequency, usefulness, need, etc.). Pairs are then organized in which the partners compare how they are alike and different. Afterward, the teacher can survey the entire class by counting the number of preferences expressed for a given item. Conversational follow-up requires the students to make a statement about themselves and at least one other person in the room.

Twosies
Skill: writing, listening comprehension, speaking
Linguistic content: general vocabulary, sentence structure
Pairs of students write a series of statements (5-10) that may be judged by one of two criteria. Example: easy/difficult, possible/impossible, good/bad, interesting/dull, polite/impolite, responsible/irresponsible, American/French, American/Spanish, (in the target language, of course). The meaning of the sentences may encourage personal judgments or may state the obvious. Example: *Je peux toucher le nez avec le pied. Escribo mi tarea con una manzana.* Two pairs may take turns reading and reacting with each other.
Variation: Students may respond with an emotional exclamation to reveal their opinion of the statement. Example: *Toco la nariz con el pie. ¡Què barbaridad!* or *Je nage tous les jours dans la piscine. Chouette!*
Variation: Expand twosies into threesies: possible/probable/impossible, polite/impolite/depends, easy/difficult/don't know, etc.

Psychologist
Skill: write or speak
Linguistic content: *to be, to think, to believe, to remember,* adjectives sentence structure, *because*
Students look at visuals from or related to the textbook (photos, drawings, transparencies, etc.). In pairs students invent situations and statements about what each person or thing is thinking or feeling and reasons why. In

feedback session, the teacher records types of answers on blackboard or overhead acetate. Comparability or divergence of answers can be a source of discussion.

Braggart/Having the last word
Skill: speaking
Linguistic content: sentence structure, modifiers
In pairs, Student A makes a statement using familiar vocabulary. Student B repeats the same sentence but adds one more word or phrase to it. Each keeps adding to the sentence until neither can add anything more that is meaningful. They count the number of words and sentences they were able to invent within the time limit. In feedback, the partners will say to the class the longest sentence they were able to create.

Mary/Gary quite contrary
Skill:speaking
Linguistic content: sentence structure, comparable elements within a sentence
In this variation on *Braggart*, Student A makes a statement. Student B restates it changing one element. They continue each one changing one part of the previously heard sentence. Within the time limits, they count the number of sentences they were able to make, what the first sentence and the last sentence were.

Spelling test
Skill: speak, listen, write
Linguistic content: alphabet, familiar vocabulary
Student A selects a group of words to dictate to Student B by spelling them aloud. Student B copies them as said by Student A. They check correctness of spelling against the list, then reverse roles.

Show and tell/giving instructions/following directions
Skill: speak, listening comprehension
Linguistic content: verbs, imperatives, subjunctive of wanting, will necessity, expressions of location
Student A tells Student B how to do something. Student B performs the act as directed. Examples: set the table, find an object in the room, assemble an object, rearrange a group of items, go to a specific destination.

Socializing
Skill: speak

Linguistic content: social formula and idiomatic expressions
The teacher describes a social situation; pairs of students invent responses to the situation. Example:

Student A	Student B
Introduce self or classmate; make one statement about that person.	Acknowledge introduction; ask a question relating to statement.
Ask a favor.	Accept with a condition or refuse and explain why.
Extend an invitation.	Accept and express thanks or appreciation. Decline with regrets or give excuse.
Make a series of statements about people you know or common	Acknowledge each one with an emotional exclamation (surprise, disgust, pleasure, acceptance, etc.).
Give a compliment.	Acknowledge or respond to the compliment.
Make a gossipy statement about a person	Ask a leading question about the statement.
State a problem. Try to secure help or advice.	Offer advice or ask for more information.
State an unfulfilled wish.	Encourage or discourage Student A in acting upon the wish.

Passport
Skill: write
Linguistic content: vocabulary of personal data and family relationships
After the teacher explains the kind of information requested on a passport application, pairs of students develop a form that requests biographical information (name, address, age, date of birth, family members—names, relationships, age).

This is your life
Skill: read, speak

Linguistic content: vocabulary of biographical data, personal experiences, and preferences
Pairs use the passport form as the basis for interviewing each other. As vocabulary and linguistic sophistication increases, they may add questions and information about likes and dislikes (sports, foods, colors, leisure activities, famous people, etc.), places visited, work information, personnal information about family members, etc.

ID Check
Skill: read, speak
Linguistic content: biographical data
From data gathered in paired interviews, ID cards can be made for all class members and kept in the classroom for year-long use. Information may be expanded to include likes and dislikes, personal heroes, things they have done, never done, want to do, can't do. Working in small groups, every student takes a card with information about another. One by one, students tell members of the group details from the card without revealing the student's name. Other group members try to guess the student's identity with the information they heard.

Photo finish
Skill: write, speak
Linguistic content: sentence structure, familiar vocabulary
Warm up or close out the last five minutes of class by distributing photos from a magazine or assigning a photo in the textbook. Each pair of students must then write as many questions and answers as they can about the photo. The next day, two pairs of students ask each other the questions they prepared.
Variation: Answers may be prepared, some of which are true and others untrue. The opposing pair has 15 seconds in which to study the photo before it is covered. They hear the statements about the photos and decide whether they are correct. Scores are kept on the number of right answers.

Sort and list
Skill: read
Linguistic content: recognition of vocabulary meaning, grammatical function, or pronunciation.
Give pairs of students 5-10 words randomly grouped. The words selected should have at least one element in common. Within the time limit (2-4 minutes depending on the number of words), students are to sort the words into two or more lists. Words may be sorted according to similarities or dissimilarities in meaning, sound, ways in which the object is used, times

when it is used, categories of actions, grammatical form, grammatical function, etc. Example: *el pan, la tortilla, la mermelada, la mantequilla, la taza, el café con leche, el plato, la servilleta, los huevos, el cuchillo.* In feedback, write or have a student record on the board the numbers of categories the students created, types of categories, what words fit, what words did not fit. Encourage students to explain their reasons for grouping words. This will reveal both convergent and divergent thinking.

Photojournalism
Skill: write
Linguistic content: autobiographical information
Students create their autobiographies using pictures, cartoons, collages, and drawings to which they write captions.

Real Characters
Skill: speak or write
Linguistic content: familiar vocabulary, sentence structure
In small groups or teams, the students write and present expanded versions of the dialogues in the textbook. They may either continue the dialogue from the point at which it ends, change crucial information in the dialogue, or invent a variation on the same dialogue.
Variation: They can make up biographies for the dialogue characters (background, origins, occupations, physical appearance).

. . .and there are more. Each of the above activities provides a core or framework that can be used with variations in lexical groups, verb tenses, other grammatical structures, and additional complications involving various people as the students' linguistic sophistication increases. Clear instructions and demonstrating what is wanted within the large group will help pairs and small groups get off to a good start. For additional variations, a listening comprehension activity can be expanded to include speaking; speaking activities may require writing; writing may involve reading; and finally reading may be recast as a listening comprehension exercise. While the instructional materials provide the linguistic material on which to build participation, it is the enthusiastic involvement of the teacher that will promote increased student participation. This kind of participation must receive an appropriate reward in the teacher's grading system. The enthusiastic teacher who sets high expectations for students, models those expectations, organizes them for maximum interaction, and provides meaningful situations for that interaction is the one most likely to enjoy the benefits of increased student participation.

Bibliography

Celce-Murcia, Marianne. "Making informed Decisions about the Role of Grammar in Language Teaching." *TESOL Newsletter*, 14(1985).

Chance, Paul. "To the Tune of the Hickory Stick," *Psychology Today*, 14(1980):80.

Hunter, Madeline. *Mastery Teaching: Increasing Instructional Effectiveness in Secondary Schools, Colleges and Universities.* El Sequndo, CA: TIP Publications, 1982, pp. 9-23.

Knop, Constance K. University of Wisconsin. Presentation at Illinois Foreign Language Teachers Association meeting, Chicago, IL, October 6, 1984.

Nerenz, Ann G. and Constance K. Knop. "The Effect of Group Size on Students' Opportunity to Learn in the Second Language Classroom," pp. 47-60 in Alan Garfinkel, ed., *ESL and the Foreign Language Teacher.* Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Co., 1985.

Robinson, Gail L. Menetz. "CIA in Foreign Languages—a Comparison of the Effectiveness of Different Methodologies and Different Forms of Error Correction," presentation at CALICO Conference, Baltimore, MD., February, 1985.

Rodriguez, Carol. Glen Crest Junior High School, Glen Ellyn, IL, Conversation and classroom visit, September, 1985.